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## CREATIVE INTERNATIONALIZATION: THE IMPORTANCE OF INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

### I. INTRODUCTION

We will explain how a relatively small French business school—ESC Clermont Graduate School of Management—has attempted to provide pertinent international education for its students. In our view, internationalizing management education depends much more on adopting and integrating genuine convictions to change the business school culture rather than merely mobilising financial resources. At the outset, the absence of extensive funding compelled the institution to introduce innovative approaches to the academic program to improve the education of future graduates for a global business context.

After more than two decades of setting up, managing and expanding the international program, we do not attempt here to assess our work using rigorous scientifically researched criteria. Rather, we attempt to stand back, describe and analyze the different steps in the process of internationalization. First, we define the term “institutional culture” and how this definition applies to our own experience of internationalizing that culture. Secondly, we describe the different stages that would each serve as a springboard for further expansion of the program. We then show how the concept of “international” has, over time, reached the very heart of the academic program, affecting the administration, the faculty, and of course the students. Finally we look at the current state of affairs and explore avenues for future developments.

### II. ORGANIZATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The notion of organizational culture first became popular with the publication of *In Search of Excellence* (Peters and Waterman, 1981). The authors claimed that “corporate culture” could explain why some companies

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succeeded, while others failed. Since then, several definitions of “organizational culture” have emerged in the literature. Deal and Kennedy define it simply as “the way we do things around here” (p. 4). O’Reilly defines it as “strong, widely shared core values” (p. 1). For Ouchi, organisational culture is “a set of symbols, ceremonies and myths that communicates the underlying values and beliefs of the organization to its employees” (p. 41). Despite the wide range of definitions, most academics agree that the concept shares three characteristics: 1) a common set of values that motivates individual behavior 2) values which are implicit and taken for granted, rather than explicit or written out and 3) values which are represented and communicated through symbols.

For us, the international component corresponds to a common set of values explicitly stated as one of the main features of the institution. These values motivate individual behavior and over time have become implicit and commonplace. Seen on a more practical level, the term “international” has come to correspond to the continuous presence and the coming and going of a wide range of students and professors from many different countries, for differing lengths of stay, at different periods of time during the year. It corresponds to the many different languages spoken continuously throughout the school. It corresponds to a feeling or attitude that encompasses so many of the different academic and social activities which we will be discussing later. So much so that the “international” component has become fully integrated and taken for granted within the institution.

### III. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

A key element to introducing and developing internationalized education relies on formulating a clear vision of what the organization should be like in the future. Next, a clearly-defined strategy for implementing that vision must be put in place. As Granitsky has pointed out: “Each school’s internationalization strategy will be unique” and “...program internationalization requires more careful and more creative allocation of resources” (p. 19, 21). The administration needs to set the tone by incorporating clear international objectives into the school’s mission statement. These intentions need to be borne out by concrete measures to ensure that the process does indeed take place. This top-down approach was adopted at ESC Clermont.

In the late seventies the director general or dean was convinced that a small-sized business school such as ours, in a provincial city in central southern France—Clermont-Ferrand—needed to gain national recognition by creating an *organizational culture* deliberately turned towards the outside,

going well beyond the country's borders. Internationalization was to serve the needs of a long-term development policy. In fact, by adopting such a strategy the director was sowing the seeds that would bear fruit in later years when no business school could ignore the effects of globalization in its provision of management education.

Introducing the international culture concerned four key elements. First, the administration made a clear commitment through a bold, up-front statement to open up the school beyond the regional and national borders. Second, full-time, tenure-track faculty of foreign origin were recruited to teach management disciplines. Third, student exchange programs with foreign universities were developed, and from the outset academic recognition was an integral part of this experience. These programs created a two-way process: sending French students to partner universities and receiving foreign students from those same institutions. Foreign language instruction was compulsory and helped nourish the exchanges so that the culture at the school gradually became more international. (Bryant, Sheehan, 1994) Finally, it was decided that all students were required to spend a minimum period of two months abroad during their studies. And this was in 1979! Today, the minimum required time studying or working abroad is six months.

#### IV. IMPLEMENTING THE VISION

The original strategy that was adopted in the late seventies created the appropriate context in which a value system emerged that recognized "international" as a valid and essential part of business education. The institution's culture and commitment were determining factors in internationalization. The NAFSA report of 2003 identifies the importance of institutional commitment to study abroad. Foreign professors in finance, information systems and international affairs were on exactly the same level as their French counterparts, and the students recognized this. Study abroad was prized, encouraged and rewarded in terms of credit towards the final degree. The exchange students from abroad discovered an academic learning community that welcomed them into their classrooms to share the learning experience with their French counterparts. The full-time professors, together with the teams of adjunct professors whom they managed, developed the necessary "emotional intelligence" to treat the foreign students as equals. (Goleman, 1995) Most importantly, all the members of the school understood and shared the administration's policy of creating an open, internationally receptive community in the business school. These foundations owed much more to the vision of the director and his wholehearted

support for any international initiative rather than to a significant allocation of financial resources.

#### V. NETWORKING

Central to the international development strategy was a firm belief in working through international networks. Already in the late seventies the school participated in the Joint Study Programme which was financed by the European Community and which turned out to be the pre-cursor to the ERASMUS program, based on networks which facilitated cooperation and exchanges. Later, in 1989, ESC Clermont, together with five other European universities, launched a consortium supported by Brussels to set up a common "European degree" at the Master's level: the European Master of Business Sciences (EMBS). Today, the consortium boasts more than twenty European universities in eight different countries. Nearly five hundred graduates have successfully completed the program. In 1996, the school joined a global network—NIBES (Network of International Business and Economics Schools) whose 17 members span four continents, considerably expanding the choices for student exchanges. Networks such as these are non-bureaucratic structures that are an essential tool for expanding exchange programs, particularly for smaller schools with limited resources.

During the 1980's and 1990's, networks were particularly effective in enabling us to develop study abroad opportunities. We have always actively encouraged and even compelled our students to study at partner universities abroad, since we believe this to be a critical part of our international management education program. Finally networks have also provided the necessary framework to encourage and to enable faculty mobility to take place.

#### VI. DOUBLE DEGREE PROGRAMS

Setting up double degree programs throughout the 1990's has taken us one step further in the process of internationalization. There are several advantages to double degree programs wherein students spend one year in the host institution and obtain that university's degree as well as their home degree:

- i) research has shown that the longer the period of time spent in the host culture the more the student will benefit from the experience and achieve a much better integration into the society. (Storti, 70)

- ii) companies recognize that students with a foreign degree have met the academic requirements of the host university. Under these conditions study abroad is certainly not a glorified tourist visit to a country. Companies have “proof in hand” that the students can adapt and succeed in the foreign country.
- iii) business schools gain in international recognition and enhance their stature during the negotiation process. Granting mutual academic recognition implies mutual faculty approval and support. Syllabi and course contents need to be scrutinized carefully, thus bringing about closer relationships and better understanding among institutions. Academic recognition by the home institution reinforces the idea that learning experiences in another country can have relevance for the home degree program. Genuine international education respects the value of other, foreign academic programs and recognizes that its own national higher education system is not the only valid one.

#### VII. MANAGING EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

Developing and managing study abroad programs require certain financial resources. This is an undeniable fact. Appropriate administrative staff need to organize and supervise the practical aspects of exchanges and to link successfully with partner universities. Often the issues of student numbers and equal balance in a reciprocal agreement need to be addressed openly and sensibly. Exchanging “apples for oranges” can be one answer. Where institutions send or receive more students than the partner, then alternative “exchange currency” can be found. Instead of requiring a strict one-to-one student exchange, one partner may agree to set up an intensive study program with company visits, for example, in exchange for a certain number of semester places. These are operational issues that can be addressed and solved.

What is more important is that the student exchanges do not require a substantial budget allocation. Each institution needs to provide adequate resources. However, the key, once again, is a genuine commitment of administration behind such programs. The organizational culture is more important than the institutional resources. In the area of exchanges, creative internationalization involves seeking imaginative solutions to ensure that cooperation can take place.

#### VIII. CREATIVE USE OF RESOURCES:

##### THE ENGLISH-TRACK DEGREE PROGRAM

Internationalization does indeed require additional financial resources. However, a creative and imaginative approach to social resources can be adopted to maximize the financial investment. For example, in order to attract more foreign students, we decided to set up an "English-track degree program," wherein management programs are taught entirely in English. This program opens up our school to students who do not have sufficient command of the French language. It also helps us to maintain balances in our exchange agreements. But how to finance such a program? Networking, as discussed earlier, provided a partial answer. We realized that it was not necessary to recruit a large cohort of "anglo-saxon" professors. Through our networking we had built up "social" capital, thus multiplying considerably the potential of the "financial" capital (Lecoutre). Inviting visiting professors from partner universities helps to develop the bonding process between the institutions as well as to achieve the primary aim of providing students with top-quality business instruction in English. Visiting professors genuinely interested in promoting mutual development projects, including research, are not solely motivated by significant remuneration packages. Furthermore, professors on sabbatical often seek short-term contracts offering an enriching international experience. For the host institution, valuable international education is achieved through wise use of its social resources.

##### IX. INTERNATIONAL WEEK

Internationalization at the home campus by teaching management disciplines in a foreign language, usually but not exclusively in English, was facilitated at our school through an experimental period. Only after this test period did we decide to offer full-time Master's degrees in English. In 1997 we chose to introduce into the management program compulsory periods when all business subjects were taught in a foreign language during a full week. "International Week" enabled us to provide management instruction given by visiting professors from partner institutions teaching in their own language: English, German or Spanish. We have described elsewhere this experiment in more detail (Bryant, Karney and Sheehan). International Week helped us to accelerate the internationalization process and has resulted in more than twenty five visiting faculty on campus, teaching management subjects in a specific week.

International Week highlights the creative use of resources. In short, the normal budget for a week's teaching in the school is re-allocated and, with

modest additional funding, we are able to cover the travel and subsistence costs for the visiting faculty who agree to accept modest stipends. The basic resources allocated to teaching are used in a different way, thus adding value to the students' education. In fact, International Week has become a highlight in the program, a kind of ritual that reinforces the international culture it was originally set up to promote. The faculty have benefited through interchange with colleagues from abroad. Social resources have become "embedded" over time, giving rise to unexpected positive consequences. For example, several cooperative teaching and research projects have emerged from these encounters. All this has been achieved with few additional marginal costs. The key has been the willingness to innovate and the entrepreneurial use of limited resources. Peter Senge describes learning organizations as places "where people are continually learning how to learn together" (p. 1). We could add that such learning organizations are also places where people learn to use resources intelligently and effectively. In today's fast changing, global environment this is a valuable skill.

#### X. KEY APPOINTMENTS IN ADMINISTRATION ACCELERATE THE PROCESS

An additional factor has helped to accelerate the internationalization process. Key appointments were made in the administrative structure. In 1999, a new post of Associate Dean was created combining responsibility for Graduate Programs and International Relations. The person appointed was of Austro-British origin. Two years later an academic of Spanish origin took up the post of Director General and Dean of the business school. These appointments have provided more than symbolic recognition of the internationalization process. They have enabled the administration to push through new programs at a faster pace. Thullen, Heyl and Brownell have identified the role of the "Chief International Educational Administrator as an agent for organisational change." For example, we immediately started recruiting ABD doctoral students from foreign institutions for one or two semester contracts. These visiting assistant professors have carried out limited teaching assignments. More importantly, they work within our academic departments and have helped to internationalize our own faculty.

#### XI. WELCOMING CULTURE

Equally important in exchanges is welcoming foreign students and faculty to the campus. Very often what counts—in addition to competent administrative staff—is the school's "attitude" to outsiders. What type of international culture has the school created over time to enable these visitors to



feel at home in a foreign environment? Involving the home students and faculty in welcoming activities has several benefits, including minimising costs. The home students feel useful and recognized within the school and the foreign students are able to integrate the institution more rapidly. The home faculty become involved in building up the school's social capital.

Part of the international culture is the way in which the home faculty deals with the linguistic skills of the incoming students. They adapt more quickly if the faculty show tolerance towards students with imperfect mastery of the host language. We have paid particular attention to this aspect of evaluating students' work. Obviously, improvements in vocabulary and grammar are encouraged, but the management faculty's task is to give instruction in business disciplines and not to correct language mistakes. If the foreign students can be understood, credit is given.

## XII. FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND MANAGERIAL SKILLS

Internationalizing a business school should involve integrating foreign languages into the core management program. Historically, French business schools have been well placed in comparison to Anglo-Saxon programs in developing these linguistics skills (Bryant, 1993). To enter our school all students must satisfy the requirements of the national competitive entrance examination which include advanced proficiency in English and one other foreign language. Over half our students opt to begin a third foreign language. Why is this an important component of international management education? And why can this be seen as a wise and intelligent use of resources? Through foreign language learning students can communicate with others, not only in English, the global business language, but also in another language which may just be the customer's own language and may just make the difference in a difficult negotiation. More importantly, knowing and understanding another language shows the student how other nationalities construct their world and their reality differently. This can provide students with crucial insights into their perception of the world around them as well as into their own perception of themselves. Above all, our students must graduate with the appropriate mindset to develop throughout their professional career. This mindset must enable them to accept and adapt to change as well as to be open and receptive to new ideas.

By integrating foreign languages into the main curriculum, several skills and management competencies are being developed simultaneously and efficiently. Indeed, the very skills developed through foreign languages, and

the logical extension—study abroad—are those that are sought by those companies developing their business globally. These skills have been proposed and effectively argued in the research by the RAND Institute on Education and Training and the College Placement Council Foundation. The researchers attempted to identify the types of managers and professionals who perform successfully in a global economy. They came up with the following skills and competencies:

- ability to communicate and work in teams of people from diverse backgrounds.
- receptivity to new ideas and ways of working, empathy, flexibility
- cross cultural competence defined as “a widened knowledge base plus openness and adaptability to different cultural perspectives”—“the critical new human resource requirement” (Bilson, 24, 26).

Studying foreign languages and cultures is part of a broad humanistic management education, and spending a significant period of time abroad helps to develop the managerial skills that companies seek in their executives.

### XIII. FACULTY INVOLVEMENT

The school’s culture must support the active involvement of full-time faculty in the internationalization process. In this area progress can be slow, but efforts need to be maintained steadily. When faculty wholeheartedly adhere to the international vision, they become invaluable champions “for the cause” within the institution. Academic program development depends heavily on faculty inventing and creating new course modules. Through cooperation with colleagues abroad our own home professors have taken pedagogical innovation to another level. Our students can take courses constructed and taught collaboratively with professors from partner institutions. To achieve this, our professors spend time abroad teaching and conducting research. Through this academic networking they not only benefit the institutions involved, but they are also in a position to extend and expand their own personal and professional development. Clearly, the business school must support such activities by providing the necessary time and resources for faculty to teach abroad. Above all, the school must provide the context within which the activity is validated and integrated into the regular curriculum.

True internationalization takes place when the academic community—faculty and students—benefit from the cross-fertilization of ideas. Promoting

physical and intellectual mobility is crucial. For our own institution, this has been achieved for students, but more progress needs to be made to enable full-time professors to be released from their usual commitments, especially with regard to managing teams of adjunct faculty.

#### XIV. THE WAY FORWARD

In the coming years, we will continue to reinforce the internationalization strategy. Increasing numbers of foreign students will be recruited into our Master's programs in English. We will be embarking on a policy of delocalization by setting up a joint program in China. Additional faculty from abroad will be appointed on full- and part-time contracts. A network of alumni working around the world will be strengthened with new involvement in the school's international development, especially in promoting our degree programs and helping to select potential candidates. More effort will be made to increase contacts with companies abroad to provide additional opportunities for our students in internships and work placements.

Our international development strategy involves constant modelling and re-modelling, shaping new forms of activity, but while we are aware of the importance of nourishing the organizational culture. In today's knowledge society we believe that our strong institutional culture, with a firm commitment to internationalization and a humanistic approach to management education, will put us in good stead to face the future challenges of an increasingly global business environment.

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